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Who were the Janssonist immigrants onboard the *Ceres*?

BY LARS-ÅKE WÄNGSTEDT

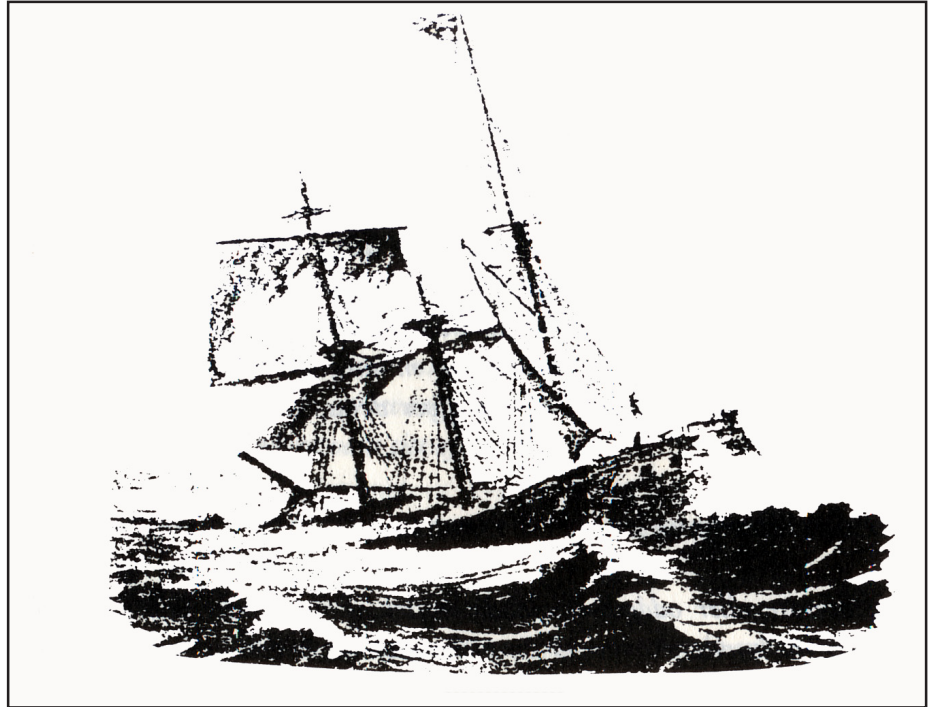
In October 1845 the bark *Ceres* sails from Gävle on its last and most dramatic voyage. Onboard is a family from Alfta. It has interesting connections to two of the important immigrants from the area.

The history of the *Ceres* has some unsolved problems that raise questions.

On Friday 12 September 1845 the brig *Neptunus* left Gävle with the Olof Olsson family [#1000-1003]¹ from Kinsta in Söderala, Hälsingland,² onboard. Olof was to prepare for the immigration of the Erik Jansson followers, as that seemed to be more and more inevitable.

The next significant information is published just three weeks later: *Norrlands-Posten* mentions on Friday 3 October 1845 among cleared vessels “on the 2nd, C.M. Brandt, skipper, *Ceres*, Söderhamn, with pig iron and various goods,” which means that the ship sailed from Gävle to Söderhamn. Four weeks later, 31 October, the same newspaper mentions that there has been an accident and says “the *Ceres* left Söderhamn bound for North America last Saturday,” which was the 25th.

The *Gefleborgs Läns Tidning* writes with more details on Wednesday 5 November: “The most recent information on the accident with the *Ceres* that we now have tells that the ship on the afternoon of the 27th October had come near the “Björn” cliffs with a southeasterly wind, and thus was cruising. The wind changed towards evening to northeasterly with storm strength and such snowfall that the lighthouse at Örskär and



The wreck of the Ceres. Drawing by Victor Witting in his memoirs.

nothing of the land was visible until the moment the ship crashed on shore. The passengers, including the captain's wife, had all gone to bed, but rushed in their semi-nakedness up on the deck, over which the sea was breaking and the ship keeled over on the port side, or the side towards land, in which situation the crew stayed until dawn the next day, when rescue was offered by the coastal inhabitants. – Thus the Erik-Janssonists, already at the inlet of the “Öregrundsgrepen” [outside the little city of Öregrund], had an excellent opportunity to begin their industrious conversion zeal, and so loud was their fervor, that their preachings nearly drowned out the captain's commands. One of them

said that he was Christ and promised all that would accept his teaching were to become blessed. At the moment nobody had time to listen to his offered indulgences, but were more concerned with salvaging their lives and goods. However, when the day came and help was coming, the fanatics declared that it was only their prayers that had saved them and the others. One of the immigrants had injured his feet, and all of them are convinced that they will try again to reach the blessed country, America. The ship is a total wreck, but part of the goods it carried might be saved, when strong enough ice has formed around the site that a salvage operation can be attempted.”



X marks where the *Ceres* was wrecked.

Victor Witting's memories

An ordinary seaman (*jungman*), Victor Witting (age 20) who was onboard, mentions the disaster in his memoirs.³ He says that it was the ship's carpenter who was hurt. This story is cited in *Tur och retur Amerika*, by Ingvar Henricson (1995).

Witting writes, according to Henricson: "With the same ship there was also supposedly travelling a small group of emigrants, so-called Erik-Janssonists. These that were to accompany us: 16-17 individuals. The room was crowded and full of people, amongst them 8 or 10 women. Among the emigrants, who mostly were young people, were several girls of age 15 to 17." (Probably the captain's wife was not counted among those.)

Why did the group leave?

For some obscure reason a small group of Janssonists had left much earlier than a report could be ex-

pected from Olof Olsson. Who were they and why were they in such a hurry? The second question might never be answered. But who they were can be discovered.

Neither Witting nor Henricson tells who these persons were. Erik Wikén mentioned in July 1984 that there were seven, and he names five of them.⁴ Wikén thus wants to reduce Witting's detailed account to only seven passengers. They are the ones that received passports in Gävle at this time. No passports for America were issued in the two other *läns* with many Janssonists – Västmanland and Kopparberg.

Passports

The owners of passports were:

Farmer Lars Larsson [#1180-#1182], 39 years, of Malvik in Alfta, with his wife Anna Lena Hedström, 35 years, and daughter Margareta [Margta], 10 years, who received their passports 13 October 1845.

Miller Jonas Malmgren [#1503], 31 years, born in Voxna, but living in Bollnäs. Passport 13 October.

Sophia Carolina Schön [#1587], 24 years, born in Österunda, but living in Forsa. Passport 23 October.

Two farmhands (*drängar*), not named.

Were they from Söderala?

In Söderala⁵ there is a detailed account of their emigrants, with the date of their receiving a testimony for obtaining passports. Two of the young men are the cousins Sven Larsson Wall, 24 years, and Olof Larsson Norling,⁶ who both have the same four grandparents. They received their testimony on 24 October, the day before the ship left, so there was no time to get a passport. They are not listed in the SPAUS, but came anyway in July-August of 1846 to Bishop Hill.⁷

This makes seven Janssonists on board the *Ceres*. There should be eight or nine more, four to six women in the age range of 15 to 17, and the rest are young men. Why were they anonymous? Well, they had thought of running away to America. They are young adults that could not count on their father's permission and the clergyman's testimony for a passport for emigration. It can not have been difficult for the underage youngsters to invent a story at the end of October to give a reason for them to go to Söderhamn. There the authorities' control of the passengers did not take place at the actual boarding of the vessel. The captain hardly asked for passports, or permission from parents. The exact number of passengers was not fixed either.

The Orström sisters

It is easy to pick two of the girls from their anonymity, the sisters Charlotta (*Lotta*) and Wilhelmina (*Mina*) Orström. Lotta Orström was born Midsummer's Eve 1821 and her sister Mina was born 16 December 1826 at Domta 1 in Österunda parish, then Västmanland *län*, now Uppsala *län*. Their parents were the farmer and former grenadier, Lars Larsson Orström, born 1790, and his wife Stina Ersdotter, born 1789 in nearby Tors-

tuna. The Orströms also had two daughters, born 1816 and 1818 in Torstuna, a son Johan, born 1829, and a little daughter Sophia, born 1835 in Österunda.

In a compilation of immigrant letters by Albin Widén, *När Svensk-amerika grundades*, with the subtitle *Emigrantbrev med kommentarer* (1961), a long letter from Bishop Hill, dated 22 March 1848, to "Beloved friends and others in Västmanland," a short excerpt says, "We, the daughters of the above-mentioned Olström, greet our father." After some Biblical citations, they write that "Olström of Dompta could say that Andersson has stolen us from him, we can await with joy as we read in 1st Book of Moses 31 that Laban, who was a better man than our father, could say so to Jacob, who had honestly served him for his daughters and property."

After some more about Anders Andersson [#1173], the letter is thensigned by Mina Olström and underneath by Lotta Olström. With such an opinion of their father it is not hard to believe that the sister wanted to come along as soon as a ship with their spiritual friends was going to leave for the land of dreams. [Writing the name as Olstrom might be an Americanization].

Lotta and Mina are not recorded in SPAUS. They might have run away on the brig *Patria*, which arrived in New York on 27 August 1846. Among the 44 named passengers is the farmer Anders Andersson of Torstuna and his family [#1173-1179], as well as the Lars Larsson family [#1180-1182], that had spent the winter with the Anderssons after the *Ceres*' wreck. To judge from the letter, the Orström sisters stayed with the Anderssons during the winter, and not with their parents.

There were more young runaways from Österunda than from any other parish, so it is logical to search for more of them in that parish.

More girls

At Norra Bångsbo lived the church warden Anders Andersson, and four of his daughters, to his dismay, had

become Janssonists. Ulrika, age 20, and another girl of the same age, and Mina Orström were examined by the pastor in advance of receiving Holy Communion in 1844. Mina Westberg tells about this in her book.⁸ The third girl was probably Anna Lovisa Andersdotter, age 20, as the age of the other candidates does not tally. Ulrika's younger sister Lovisa, two years younger, was probably a third possible passenger on the *Ceres*. The older unmarried sisters, 24 and 26 years old, do not seem likely to be in the group, they are almost ten years older. Ulrika and Anna Lovisa immigrated with the *Patria* [#11194, 1195], while Lovisa ran away.

The farmhands

Wikén's farmhands might be supplemented with more males from Söderala. The farmer's son Jonas Jonsson Lindholm, called "Jonas i Norrbyn," age 24, and his 2nd cousin, the farmer's daughter Helena Persdotter, age 24, are of the same age as the Larsson cousins. Three sisters of Jonas are mentioned in SPAUS; Helena's father was a church warden, so it is reasonable that she had to run away to follow the Janssonists.

An interesting person is "Dunderberg's Kerstin," almost 31 years, a sister of Sven Larsson's, with whom she was arrested in Falun in August 1845 for being without passports. She ought to have been able to get a testimony as well as her brother, if she intended to travel with the *Ceres*, so I don't think she was one of the missing passengers. The youngest brother, Lars, age 20, is possible but not probable. He later immigrated with his parents [#1299-1301]. The only young woman, age 22, from Söderala that did not go with her parents is Karin Persdotter, and nothing points to her being on board the *Ceres*.

Beyond what is written about Jonas in the Söderala booklet, the following can be told: he came in the company of the Larsson cousins to Bishop Hill,⁸ where he died of cholera in the summer of 1849.⁹ He was not married to a girl from Forsa, but

instead to a girl from Alfta,¹⁰ Brita Olsdotter [#2002], born 6 August 1827 at Älvkarhed, and they were married 9 July 1848 in Bishop Hill. She is the most prominent person in the exhibition at the *House of Migrants* in Alfta.

Österunda people

Back to Österunda, Anders Jonsson Stenberg is the brother of Olof Jonsson [#1396, #4507]¹¹ from Stenbo in Forsa, who bought Erik Jansson's part of Klockaregården. He married in June 1848 to Lovisa Andersdotter Dahlgren.¹² Both ran away, probably with the *Patria*. Just as "Jonas i Norrbyn" and his travel companion Jonas Jonsson Hedin [#1023?, #1524] from Hede in Härjedalen, he might have been a part of the male group on-board the *Ceres*. Another runaway from Österunda was Erik Andersson Lindström, almost 23 years, who later became the above-mentioned Brita Olsdotter's second husband.

Jan Eric Olsson, age 20, is a farmhand at Klockaregården, and one of the many that were sued by the assistant pastor (*komminister*) Arenander on 22 June 1844.¹³ He is later denied the necessary testimony by Arenander to get a passport, but still gets one under the name John E. Silén [#1375]. Perhaps he was planning to emigrate already when the *Ceres* left the harbor. He married Sophia Schön on 16 July 1848¹⁴ and both later committed bigamy!

As the Larsson family from Alfta is only found on the *Ceres* in the Janssonist history, it might not be them that is at the core of the runaways from the parish. Nor are there any persons whose activities might have forced them to run away to America.

Delsbo missing people

In Delsbo there were four teenage siblings that became Janssonists and opposed their parents. A brother and a sister were each during October 1846 notified as missing.¹⁵ The youngest sister, 15½ years old, returns home. The other siblings might have run away to America. It does not

seem reasonable that one of them had run away already in 1845 to go on the *Ceres*, and then returned home after the wreck.

The unknown Janssonists on the *Ceres* might have been:

Charlotta (Lotta) Larsdotter Orström, 24, from Österunda
Wilhelmina (Mina) Larsdotter Orström, 18, from Österunda
Anna Lovisa Andersdotter [#1195], 21, from Österunda
Ulrika Andersdotter Dahlgren [#1194], 21, from Österunda
Lovisa Andersdotter Dahlgren, 19, from Österunda
Anders Jonsson Stenberg, 22, from Forsa
Jan Erik Olsson Silén [#1375], 20, from Österunda
Erik Andersson Lindström, 22, from Österunda
Jonas "i Norrbyn" Jonsson Lindholm [#1024?], 24, from Söderala
Helena Persdotter, 24, from Söderala
Jonas Jonsson Hedin [#1023?, #1524], 29, from Hede in Härjedalen

The "girls" are a bit overage, as described by Witting. But Witting who was just 20 years old at the time might have misjudged their age when he wrote his memoirs 60 years later.

[*Author's note*: I have not found any girl of the age 15-17 that had run away to America, and such a decision probably needs a more mature mind to make.]

What happened in the U.S.?

Henricsson writes at the end of his narrative "Of the immigrants that were in the shipwreck it was possibly only Sven Larson in Victoria, Illinois, who still was alive when Victor Witting wrote his memoirs in the early 1900s." Eric Johnson (compare note⁷) writes about the *Ceres* (p. 27) "of the thus shipwrecked persons the following are still alive, Jonas Malmgren in Bishop Hill, Margaretha Erickson

of Galva, Sven Larson of Victoria, and Sophia Schön, who returned to Sweden 12 years ago."

[*Authors's note*: of the candidates for the anonymous passengers on the *Ceres* are missing from his list: Anna Lovisa Andersdotter, Jonas Hedin, Erik Lindström, Helena Persdotter, John Silén, Anders and Lovisa Stenberg, and Mina Westberg were still alive in 1880, but only John Silén in 1904].

Mina Orstrom married Hans Hammarbäck in Bishop Hill on Midsummer's Day 1848. His place of birth and date of arrival in America are not known. Elmén calls him a former seaman, and Liljeholm¹⁶ (1860) a former mate. Mrs. Hellstrom¹⁷ says that he was supposed to marry Mrs. Pollock,¹⁸ but she married Linjo Lars Gabrielsson [#1253] on 9 July 1848 instead. She also maintains that he taught English and was an important man. Both these men died from cholera in 1849. In June 1849 Mina and Hans had the son Elias, who died in 1851.

Mina is mentioned in SPAUS in connection with her next parents-in-law, Per Jonsson Westberg and his wife Brita Henriksdotter [#4369-#4370]. They travelled with the *Aeolus* from Söderhamn and arrived in New York on 17 September 1850. Two sons were listed. Jonas's family is recorded, but not the young brother Johan (John) Henrik Westberg, born 16 April 1824 in Själevad in Angermanland. In June 1851 Mina married John¹⁹ and in 1861 they moved to a farm outside Galva. They had a family of seven children, of which one died in infancy.

The founder of the Swedish Mission Covenant Church Peter Paul Waldenström writes in his travelogue *Genom Norra Amerikas Förenta Stater* (pp. 383-384) about a visit with the Westbergs 19 July 1889: "She has a very lively temperament and with her whole spirit emits pure delight about Erik Jansson and his activities."

The story of the *Ceres* started with an Alfta family and must end with more about them to explain the introduction. The wife Anna Lena

Hedstrom was a half-sister of Carl Magnus Flack [#803] the storekeeper from Älvkarhed, who was denied the same job in Alfta. He brought five friends with him to America in 1843, two were connected to the pastor of Alfta. His letters home have been deemed important in helping to grow the dream of liberty that caused the immigration of the Janssonists.

I have no information about the Larsson family's interest in the Janssonists or in immigration before the accounts of the *Ceres*. Perhaps they were enticed by Flack to look for their happiness in America, and had been given a tip to travel in the fall to arrive well before it was time to start planting in the spring and be there for the harvest before the winter. If this was so, the *Ceres* was perfect, and perhaps the meeting with the faithful believers of Erik Jansson made them follow them to Bishop Hill instead of seeking land elsewhere. The father of the family probably died in the cholera. The daughter Margta eventually married and still has descendants in the U.S.

To me the causes of the family's settlement in Bishop Hill and among the Janssonists is still a mystery both in Sweden and America.

On 23 May 1846 the Larssons got their passport in Västerås. Their previous one is said to have been destroyed in the shipwreck, but was really taken to Oslo (Christiania) in Norway by Olof Larsson Norling and used for the family of Erik Jansson.²⁰ Thus there is a connection between the two most famous immigrants from the Alfta area; Carl Magnus Flack and Erik Jansson and the *Ceres*.

End notes:

- 1 Nils William Olsson + Erik Wiken 1995: *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in The United States 1820-1850*, called SPAUS. Within [] is shown the immigrant's notes in SPAUS.
- 2 *Norrlands-Posten*:71 16 September 1845 and *Hudikswalls Weckoblad*:38, 20 September 1845.
- 3 Victor Witting, *Minnen från mitt lif* (1904).

- 4 Erik Wikén: "New light on the Erik Janssonist's emigration, 1845-1854." *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*, July 1984. This information is also mentioned by Olov Isaksson in *Historien om Bishop Hill* chapter 4, note 7. (1995).
- 5 Ulla Eriksson + Lars-Ove Johansson 1993: *Emigrationen från Söderala till Bishop Hill och Norra Amerika åren 1845-1855*, 3rd edition (1994).
- 6 The name Norling comes from Söderala. In America he is called Nor(d)lund.
- 7 Eric Johnson + C. F. Peterson, *Svenskarne i Illinois* (1880), p. 154. Cecilia Wejryd: *The book burning lay readers: Erik Jansson and the Erikjanssonists in Sweden during the 1840's* (2002), p. 156 not ² names all seven who received passports in Gävle. Bröd-Jonas Malmgren is here called Brodd-Jonas.
- 8 *Erik Janssonisternas historia*, printed 1902 in Galva, Illinois, is a story about the Janssonists, written by those who were there at the beginning. The book is referenced as **Westberg**. According to the catalog of Swedish-American books held at the Swedish Emigrant Institute, both Mina Westberg and Anna Maria Stråle are mentioned as contributors.
- 9 Dan Londberg [3514]: "Nytt Bref ifrån Amerika 30 October 1849." Included in *Hälsingland*: Editor: Richard Holmström and S. Artur Svensson *Allhems landskapsböcker*. (1974).
- 10 A letter written by him was published in *Swedish American Genealogist* 2007/1.
- 11 Card index of marriages in Bishop Hill 1848-1853, a copy kept by the Alfta Hembygdsförening.
- 12 Born 30 November 1822. The marriage is not found in the card index.¹¹
- 13 Identified as [#1524] but *Wilhelminas* departure 29 June does not fit with note.⁷ This Jon Jonsson is part of a group of siblings and their mother, a group of 10 persons.
- 14 **Westberg** p. 81, compare note ⁸. Paul **Elmén**: *Wheat Flour Mes-*
- siah*, (1976) p. 101. **Wejryd** p. 207.
- 15 Public announcements #61 and #65/1846. Printed in *Norrlands-Posten* 6 and 23 October 1846.
- 16 Died of cholera. **Elmén** p. 120 refers to information from Johan Edvard **Liljeholm** (1981): *Detta förlovade land - Resa i Amerika 1846-1850*, p. 40. The miller Hans Hammarbäck of Östanå, Ovanåker, is somebody else.
- 17 Probably Jommo Jonas Christina [#1219] from Östra Fors, Malung; married 30 July 1848 to Per Jons-son Hällström [#2018?] from Grängsbo 3, Alfta.
- 18 [180?] Married the second time to Pollock. See Erik **Wikén**: "Erik Jansson's Second Wife Anna Sophia" in *Swedish American Genealogist* 1991 Nr. 1.
- 19 Card index, compare note¹¹, mentions Sunday 8 June with Olof Jons-son Stenberg as the officiant. Obituary in *Galva Standard* gives Tuesday 24 June.

The Membership index of Bishop Hill names the same day of death for both for Mina and John. However, he died exactly seven years earlier according to the *Galva News* 19 May 1892.

- 20 Eric Johnson: *The Viking*, newspaper March 1907. p. 10, George **Swank** *Bishop Hill - Swedish-American Showcase*, (1997), p. 60.

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Olof Olsson. Photo from Faces of Utopia. A Bishop Hill Family Album, by Nancy Lidberg Pinzke (1982).

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